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ABSTRACT

As an examination of the role played by rural schools in the history of the Wyoming frontier and the result of an effort to locate and preserve information related to country schools, this report is part of an eight-state research effort. Periodicals, unpublished manuscripts, school records and interviews with 19 Wyoming residents reveal details about Wyoming country schools as community centers, as historical sites, as part of the Americanization effort for ethnic groups, and as part of the current educational system. These sources also provide accounts of country school teachers (their training, roles, rules, and restrictions) and rural school curriculum, focusing on reading, writing, arithmetic, and recitation. "The most impressive thing about the interviews and documents gathered for this report is the sense of accomplishment these early teachers felt. They believed their schools belonged to them and that their dedication and work was repaid by the community in a kind of respect and trust that is lacking in the profession today. They are remembered with love and respect by both student and community. Nostalgia can dim the harsher aspects of rural school life in Wyoming, but the claims made for it by its former students appear to be sincere." (Author/NEC)

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COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY: Humanities on the Frontier

WYOMING'S COUNTRY SCHOOLS. COMPREHENSIVE REPORT.

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1981

Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities
Sponsored by the Mountain Plains Library Association

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COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY: HUMANITIES ON THE FRONTIER

The Mountain Plains Library Association is pleased to be involved in this project documenting the country school experience. Funding of this project from the National Endowment for the Humanities, cost sharing and other contributions enabled us all to work with the several state-based Humanities Committees as well as many other state and local libraries, agencies and interested citizens. We are deeply impressed not only by the enthusiasm for this work by all concerned but by the wealth of experience brought to bear in focusing attention on—and recapturing—this important part of history, and how we got here. This project seems to identify many of the roots and "character formation" of our social, political and economic institutions in the West.

Already the main Project objective seems to be met, stimulating library usage and increasing circulation of historical and humanities materials in this region. Public interest is rising in regional, state and local history. Oral history programs are increasing with greater public participation. The study of genealogy—and the search for this information—is causing much interest in consulting—and preserving—historical materials. What has been started here will not end with this project. The immediate results will tour the entire region and be available for any who wish the program, film, and exhibit. There will be more discussion of—and action on—the issues involving the humanities and public policies, past and present. The Mountain Plains Library Association is proud to be a partner in this work, the Country School Legacy, and its contribution to understanding humanities on the frontier.

Joseph J. Anderson
Nevada State Librarian
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COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY: HUMANITIES ON THE FRONTIER

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COUNTRY SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITY CENTERS

The country school remains fixed in the public mind as a community center and such an image is still being constructed by television shows like "Little House on the Prairie." The myth and the reality of the country school are difficult to separate, and one wonders if they need separation since they deal with education and abstract values. The reality and the myth do agree, however, that the country school was the center of the community. Early European visitors to the United States, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, were astonished at how small a presence the government made in the various communities they visited. The absence of soldiers and government officials lent a sense of freedom from government control. The country school was, in a sense, the only centralized building, outside of the post office, which would be reasonable called a government building. However, the funds for that building were raised locally, not

always from taxes, and the schools belonged to the community and not the government. The county and state government would later intrude in the curriculum in the form of a standard course of study, and in more recent decades in the form of various federal government assistance programs: a thing of controversy which has not yet been settled.

The teacher was often the only paid employee in the area who drew a salary from public funds, and the community felt free to use her as a director of community events and to prepare the buildings for meetings and other functions.[1] In small, isolated communities in the state, socialization was a strong community need and often the only point of contact for members of the community was the school. The school's location was also a factor in making it the community center. The schools were placed on a location that would permit equal distances of travel for the students in the days when most traveling was done on foot. Generally speaking there was an attempt to place the school on a location that would permit no more than six miles travel for a family.[2]

The hard daily work of farming and ranching also made people more conscious of the need for some form of relaxation. The children themselves enjoyed school for that reason, and the adults, especially after a long and hard winter, felt the need to meet neighbors and friends. It was the parents who supported the school as a community center and participated in the preparations for meals and in making interior arrangements for things like Christmas programs and graduations.[3] Given the American bent for the practical, these community affairs were also fund raising devices for the purchase of new school equipment or field trips for the students.

The kinds of entertainment varied, but some remained traditional in origin and observation. The two big programs were the Christmas program and the graduation exercise. It is only in recent years that the Christmas program has entered into the "Church and State" controversy, but prior to the 1950's it was a carefully laundered non-religious/religious program. America was settled by an incredible number of religious groups, not all of them tolerant, and the size of the country permitted settlement without too much abrasive contact. Even on the frontier, however, these religious beliefs had to meet in the school. A general feeling that "some" kind of religious program should be given in a predominantly Christian community, had to be tempered with a concern about raising religious conflicts. The Christmas program could successfully do that with Santa Claus as a substitute for Jesus and the community could relax and enjoy a program without a sense of gravity and reverence.

There are many testimonies to the success of the Christmas program. School records indicate that variations of the program, like "kidnapping Santa Claus", were reason enough to call off school for the day. Milt Riske reports an incident where a student with whooping cough was prevented from attending the program, and she was bundled up and taken by sled to the school where Santa gave her a doll off the tree and presented it through an open window.[4] In the older school recollections there are accounts of the dangers associated with Christmas programs when the trees were decorated with candles and a man was appointed to watch the tree for an accidental fire.[5] There is also the incident when a cowboy

selected to play Santa Claus showed up at the program intoxicated. He had stopped at a ranch or saloon on the way to the program.[6] Other mishaps that are now remembered with amusement are the teacher who forgot the names of her students in the program and was fired for it; angels that couldn't make it through a window in a nativity play, and a Christmas program that was so cold the parents decided to build a new and warmer school.[7]

Although Christmas programs were the most popular, the end of the year school day was one that everyone in the community participated in whether they had children or not. Parents who had traveled long distances felt the entire day should be given over to pleasure, and a picnic usually capped off the graduation ceremony. This was also a time to reward scholarship and attendance and the county superintendents tried to make the ceremonies as impressive as possible.

Award certificates were signed by the superintendents and presented by them, if possible. It was expected that the teacher would organize the graduation ceremony and picnic. Before the advent of student evaluation by testing, many teachers dug into their own pocketbook to come up with momentos of the occasion. These were usually little books or pamphlets that were adorned with standardized engravings of patriotic or religious themes and poetry that emphasized good citizenship and a love of education.[8] These small tokens of appreciation are the most prized possession of many former country school students. Other holidays were handled in the same manner.

> My third year of teaching was at the Owen school fifty miles north of Douglas. Rosalie Brewen had a lively school six

> miles away. We had several joint projects. One delightful experience was our Easter egg hunt. Rosalie and I bought many chocolate chickens and rabbits so each child would be able to find at least one chocolate candy. The mothers dyed eggs. Rosalie and I were overwhelmed with the milk pails full of colored eggs. We hid them around the school house and let the little ones hunt on one side, the older children on the other. Wyoming sage brush has never yielded such treasures![9]

The social programs included dancing and card games as well as seasonal gatherings on unofficial holidays like Halloween. Talks with young and old participants at a Halloween party this year at the Kelly School outside of Jackson indicate that the community enjoyed the program and the older paople who had attended the school in their youth also had similar programs.[10]

The dances were the main attractions through the year and the teacher often hired the fiddler and planned the refreshments.[11] These were truly community affairs, and even though some families frowned on dancing, it was done with great pleasure.

> There were many gatherings at the schoolhouse during the years. At Christmas and at the end of the year there were programs, parties, and dinners. The favorite gatherings were dances. Mrs. Bates played the organ or piano, Mrs. Boermer played a mouth harp, and Mrs. Stall sang and kept time for dancing. They called this group the Pumpkin Center Orchestra. Sometimes Pete and Byron Stall had to work the bellows by hand to keep the music going on the organ. Sometimes the Borners moved their piano over on a sled for extra music.[12]

In schools too small for dancing, the dance might move out to a barn or to some other building in town, but the teacher would be expected to organize the dance. Early teachers were often startled when they responded to job application queries, "What can you do for our community?" After accepting the job, one young applicant was horrified to discover that she had to play for the Saturday night dances in town. The dance was held at a local pool hall,

a sin palace by the young lady's standards and upbringing, but she learned to roll with the punches, and her teacher's contract.[13] The dances were well attended, and enthusiastic. Dances at the old Evergreen school in Hot Springs county became so vigorous that the dancers had to leave the building periodically because the dust kicked up by the dancing clogged the ventilation vents in the gas lamps and the lamps went out.[14]

There are very early records showing the use of country schools as churches and Sunday schools. Small congregations of differing faiths would make the construction of a permanent church impossible, and the services could be handled by a traveling preacher.[15] There is also the opposite movement, some new communities used the local church as a school until a new building could be put up.[16] Weddings were also recorded that took place in the school and one macabre case of an autopsy being performed in the local school house.[17]

The schools had heavy use by local and regional associations like the Grange, Red Cross, Women's clubs, water boards, and Cattlemen's Association. Many districts required that all school board meetings take place in the school itself, but because of lack of lighting, meetings had to be moved to a neighboring ranch house and the change of procedure was duly noted in the minutes.[18] The typical usage might be best summed up in Vera Saban's experience at the Upper Beaver Creek School near Shell.

> At Upper Beaver Creek, as in other districts, the schoolhouse served as a voting precinct and for occasional social gatherings. There were the customary Christmas programs. In November of my first year we had a program and a 'carnival'--quite an ambitious project on my part, but we did have the fortune telling lady, the fish pond, etc. and a dance with

> music by a fiddler from Shell. We had to charge a bit for the dance to pay the fiddler five dollars.
>
> I remember attending dances at the Lower Beaver Creek schoolhouse, riding with an escort down the creek several miles. Once we even rode twelve miles to Shell town to a dance--I believe it was an election dance in 1926. During my second term at Beaver Creek the people of the community, with a yen for some entertainment, had a series of 'surprise parties'--unexpectedly converging on some ranch home. Furniture was pushed aside, somebody played a fiddle or an organ, or even just a harmonica, and all danced, chiefly square dances, until nearly morning. Of course, getting to these parties was by means of horses on a wagon or a sleigh, or horseback since the roads were not passable for cars. Children were loaded into the conveyance and taken along, and put to sleep when they tired, at the dance. (Shades of the Virginian!)[19]

The school was a cultural center in the truest meaning of that word. Much of the communal entertainment in our time is produced by the mass media and sent directly into the home, and perhaps the saddest commentary on the above experience of Vera Saban are the undocumented reports that in the late 1940's the local music makers had given way to the playing of the radio in the school for dance music. The introduction of the inexpensive record player also ended a rather unique kind of communal enterprise. Although the phonograph was used by innovative teachers to stimulate a love of music, it brought an end to "live" music at the local dance.[20]

The end of many programs which could be shared by students, parents, and teachers was also the result of the large sports programs sponsored by the consolidated high school, and the more specialized dramatic school play gradually drove the parents away from the program except as spectators.[21] The dismantling of a community begins when there are certain functions in that community that cannot be shared: roles are now determined by such things as sex, age, and specialized training. This is perhaps the greatest

loss of the rural country school, and it is the one institution which seems to have no successor to fill its place. The rewards of specialization are increased competence and proficiency: the polished dramas and music on television. However, the sense of participation by the audience is lost and they can only become passive critics. The remoteness of the country school taxed the ingenuity and the community in creating entertainment and recreation. Most of the people interviewed felt that if their artistic skills were not polished, they were at least enjoyable. Something important was lost when the community became passive spectators at a night football game, or when they had to wait up nights for their children to come home from school dances to which the parents were not invited.

This shared participation still continues in the various rural schools that survive around the state, and the Christmas program is well attended. Somehow this sense of community can survive if people are willing to pay the price for it, but the need to develop specialized competence even in entertainment forces a decision upon the community that they wished they didn't have to make. Teachers who have taught in both rural and consolidated schools feel the loss of community and yet see the advantages in the training consolidation brings.[22] The experience in group living can only be acted out, and to substitute some form of drama performed by those students best qualified by training will rob the remainder of the student body of a chance to share in something they will remember all their lives.

It is amazing how much of the rural school's time and efforts went into teaching students how to live with one another and to find a place within the surrounding community. Parents were close at hand for consultation with the teacher, and the community at large had a large role to play in the programs that produced a sense of belonging. There are almost no comparable institutions existing in the country today. Even in his entertainment, the student has been separated from his parents by the time he can begin activities in the upper grades and junior high. This can be confirmed by any rural parent who has to drive his children back into town several days a week to take children to play practice or to a science club meeting. People accustomed to the more polished performances of music and entertainment on television and radio tend to feel somewhat embarrassed about offering their own amateur talents for public display.

It is unlikely that the role of the rural school as a community center will ever be regained unless there are some very basic changes in the American society, and those changes are tied to low cost transportation, rapid communication, and the mass media. Just as live drama becomes something else on television, community life becomes something else when we watch "Little House on the Prairie."

FOOTNOTES

[1] Milt Riske, "Country Schools as Community Centers," final report submitted for Country School Legacy, February, 1981. p. 1.

[2] Albert A. Seaman, tape of meeting by Washakie County Historical Society, November 30, 1980.

[3] Cecelia Dietrich Kyatt, taped interview, Sheridan, Wyoming, October 24, 1980.

[4] Riske, "Country Schools as Community Centers," final report, p. 3.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 4.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Charlotte Louisa Mayer, taped interview, Cowley, Wyoming, December 20, 1980.

[9] Anna Schlick Ballard, unpublished history of normal training program at Douglas High School, undated.

[10] Although the Kelly school is a new building, it still stands on the same site and is an essential part of the community. Older people in the area had attended the old school, but they seem to see a continuation of their school experience.

[11] Robert Barthell, "Country Schools as Community Centers," final report submitted for Country School Legacy, February, 1981, p. 5.

[12] Ibid., p. 4.

[13] Ibid., p. 3.

[14] Ibid., p. 5.

[15] Riske, p. 1.

[16] "Early Wyoming Schools: Hot Springs County," Wyoming Public School Boards Bulletin, vol. XV, (May-June 1971) no. 4. p. 6.

[17] Riske, p. 1.

[18] Riske, p. 2.

FOOTNOTES (CONT.)

19 Barthell, p. 5.

20 Riske, "Reading, Writing, 'Rithmetic, and Recitation," final report, p. 4.

21 Peter King, taped interview, Hot Springs County Library, January 31, 1981.

22 Ibid.

COUNTRY SCHOOLS AS HISTORICAL SITES

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the southern part of the state was settled first, and the establishment of schools naturally took place there earlier than in other areas. The homestead laws opening up the state for settlement brought in people faster than the schools could be built. This had an impact on the construction of country schools and also accounts for the relatively few school buildings that have been preserved and that are in good condition. Looking at the old maps of the school districts, it is surprising how many of these schools existed at one time.[1] Fifty years ago there were over one thousand country schools serving 15,000 students who were taught by 1200 teachers. The statistics reported for this project indicate that there are twenty-five districts left with at least one country school. In those districts are eighty-two rural elementary schools with 139 teachers serving 1,296 students. Some of these schools have only one or two pupils per teacher.[2]

There are several things to consider in tracing down country schools in the state: poor construction, multiple use, renaming of school districts, and consolidation.

In the rush to meet the need for schools in the ranching and homestead communities, schools were rather poorly constructed. Those built around the turn of the century were basically log or slab log construction and were intended only as temporary structures until new frame buildings could be erected. As communities waxed or waned in their prosperity, so did the schools.[3] The standard frame structure was aimed at, but many schools fell far short of that ideal. The buildings themselves were often moved to a new population center and many new teachers found themselves looking for their school at its old site when it could be found miles down the road. Some of these schools had traveled more than their teachers.

Generally speaking, the school was located, or attempts were made to do so, in the center of the community it served. In an age before school buses the children walked to school and it was felt that two to four miles was the best distance since it still allowed the younger children to walk. There are many instances of students traveling much farther, but these were exceptions for most districts. This meant that a number of structures had to be erected, but it also meant that the tax or financial base for the district might not be very strong. The ups and downs of grain and cattle markets moved families in and out of districts and most school boards were reluctant to build good schools until the money was available. Wyoming had a mobile population, as it does today, and

the boom and bust economy often disrupted the construction of sound buildings.[4] The ones that were put up were not always made of the best material and many times were built by unskilled hands. This allowed for a rapid physical deterioration of the building, especially if it were abandoned for any period of time. What is astonishing is the number of the older structures that are still standing.

The constant movement of the buildings to new sites also complicates the identification of these schools for they are often carried on maps in several locations, although it was the same school that did the traveling. Movement often occurred when the land was loaned to the school district and not signed over. Disputes over the school could allow a rancher or farmer to request removal of the school to another site, or impose conditions on its continued existence at that site. School fights could, and did, erupt and new districts formed with one district keeping the site and the other getting the school house.[5]

Abandonment of the school building also meant that it could be put to other uses in the form of a house, barn, or outbuilding. In a treeless country where lumber was scarce and expensive, it was considered foolish to allow good building material to stand idle. Simply trying to identify the part of what is a now rather large house as the old school building would tax both an architect and historian's abilities. Early schools were also held in ranch houses and in tents which carried an officially designated name, but no distinct school structure was attached to it. In the years that "summer schools" only were conducted because of bad winter weather, the classes would be held outdoors or in a sheep wagon.[6] Ambitious

legislation by the state legislature to pay for schools out of general taxation rather than voluntary subscriptions ran on the hard ground of getting enough money from taxes to make good the legislative promise. Schools continued to be financed in part by local contributions and built with donated labor.[7] It was also not unusual for an impatient family to build a school building, or use an existing bunkhouse, and hire the teacher themselves.

Records abound on the use of saloons, churches, stores, warehouses and other structures for classes. The passing of the compulsory attendance laws in the Wyoming Territory in 1873 marked the legal beginning of rural schools in Wyoming.[8] The enforcement of that law, and the construction of buildings to meet the needs lagged far behind the legislators' intentions. Wyoming's traditional problem of having too few people living too far apart in too much land holds as true today as it did in 1873, but it handicapped the construction of sound schools and in this age is a detriment to preserving the existing buildings. Getting the funds to preserve an old school in an isolated community is as difficult, or more so, as it was to build the same school fifty or eighty years ago.

The renaming of schools when they changed districts or had population shifts within the district presents problems for the historical researcher. Schools were named after geographical points or other landmarks and names like "Eagle's Nest," "Paradise Valley," and "Cottonwood" were duplicated many times throughout the state.[9] There was also a tendency to name the school after the family who donated the land or upon whose land the school was moved. Changes in land ownership would then mean a renaming of the school. Another

custom was to name the school after the children attending. This was fairly common on the so-called "ranch" schools. A large family moving into a district could change the name of the school by the sheer number of students from one family that attended it. The first sign of permanence to the school building itself started with the "standardization" of schools in the 1920's.

To obtain standardization certain physical elements of the school had to be met. This included well sites, good outdoor bathrooms, playground equipment, flag pole, and other additions to the structure that made movement of the building a more complicated and expensive procedure than it had been in the past. An analogy for this would be the donation of buildings to the medieval university which made it a fixed institution that could no longer travel to where the grass was greener. This is also a complication which will arise if the schools attempt any statewide movement to decentralize the large consolidated schools.

Consolidation of a district could mean that the school board would close a school and not expend the funds to maintain the abandoned country school buildings, or the school and property would be sold. Districts that had rural schools under their jurisdiction did try to maintain them on an equal basis, but the demand for maintenance on the larger consolidated schools gave them priority at budget time, and a deterioration of the school building could be accelerated.[10]

Many of the country schools were torn down and replaced by newer metal buildings which required less maintenance. Although they might be built on the same spot, like the Kelly school in

Jackson, they are a new building carrying the old name. Newer school districts also found that the mobile home or "double wide" mobile home were well suited to the needs of the rural school and they have the additional value of being transportable. They also come complete with toilet and kitchen facilities and are pleasant structures inside. Having these kinds of schools also means an additional attraction when it comes to employing a teacher, because many of them will not go to schools with primitive physical plants.

Schools were abandoned in the early days without much regret. A school in Evanston was abandoned because it became infested with bedbugs. There were complaints that the bugs were "so bad that teachers attempting to sleep in the buildings placed the legs of the beds in cans of kerosene."[11] Others suffered more honorable transitions: the Komo Ridge School was changed into a parsonage for the Episcopal Church in Rock River; Woods Landing's School became a postoffice; two schools in Laramie county were moved together and made into a community center; the Tie Siding's school in Albany County became a store.[12]

Albany County has the largest number of rural schools in Wyoming. There are six schools scattered through the county. Some of the buildings have been replaced by mobile homes and they do not fit the Country School Project's definition of a rural school. The location and history of these schools remains the most difficult, long term part of the project. It will require a great deal of digging to turn up the school records and to locate the many school sites that once existed in the state. Although this will be the most difficult part of any research on

Wyoming country schools, it will be the one which will ultimately bring in the most valuable information. Probably the most interesting project to do in future years would be to trace the effects of decentralization of schools and see if that pattern of new schools will overlay on the older maps of the country school sites. It is not inconceivable that decentralization could take place as rapidly as consolidation did, and the revitalization of the rural school will again depend on the conditions which determine its placement on a site that will be within reach of the children within that district.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Map of Hot Springs County schools, Hot Springs County Museum, Thermopolis, Wyoming.

[2] Milt Riske, "Country Schools as Historical Sites," final report for Country School Legacy, February, 1981, p. 1.

[3] Bea Baker, taped interview, Pioneer Home, Thermopolis, Wyoming, December 29, 1980.

[4] Hyatteville School Records, 1901 to 1944.

[5] Beaver Creek School Board Records, 1908 to 1915.

[6] Margaret Ashley Dempster, unpublished autobiography of teaching experience. No date.

[7] Riske, p. 3.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 10.

[10] James H. Moore, taped interview, Riverton, Wyoming, February 14, 1981.

[11] Riske, p. 7.

[12] Ibid., p. 9.

COUNTRY SCHOOLS AND THE AMERICANIZATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS

The southern part of Wyoming was settled first, due to the location of the railroad and major army posts that guarded it. Although there were large numbers of foreigners in the frontier army, and many came to work on the railroad, the settlement of the state by small homesteaders came at a much later period.[1] Most of the area in the north had to wait for the completion of irrigation projects which depended on the completion of the Buffalo Bill Dam in Cody. The army and railroad workers moved on, for the most part, and the homesteaders who began arriving after the completion of the railroad were first and second generation Americans who had left the settled East and Middle Western states for free land in Wyoming. There were a few isolated ethnic settlements, but even in the coal towns like Gebo, the family and parents may have spoken slavic or German languages, but the children had been Americanized and spoke English.[2]

School records, for the most part, are silent on the question of immigrants but there are a wide variety of foreign names that appear often in small farming communities. However, no notations on the students progress seem to indicate problems with language, and the teachers generally made comments on students who might encounter difficulty in an advanced grade.[3] There were problems, of course, for those few had ended up in a new land whose customs and language they didn't understand. These problems were either intensified by a harsh teacher, or overcome by care and attention by an understanding one.

A case in point would be Hedwick Miech whose parents came from Poland to America and ended up in Wyoming working in the coal fields around Big Piney. The family spoke Polish at home and the older children taught the younger children in the family the English they learned at school. Hedwick recalls the teachers as being kind and helpful to the Polish children. She was shy and did not speak at all at school. She remembers that one teacher "Whipped me because I would not talk." The language problem was overcome because "A good, kind teacher worked with me, encouraged me and finally on the school ground one day, I spoke for the first time" at school and in English. Her background returned as a problem only once when she became a teacher. A boy's father objected to his son having a "foreigner as a teacher."[4]

There are cases of students exposed to one or two Swedish students in their classes, but these were more a matter of curiosity than antagonism or hatred.[5]

Some problems arose during and shortly after World War One when anti-German feeling ran high. Migrant Germans who followed the new sugar beet crops were subjected to verbal abuse and a few fights resulted. The town of Germania, now Emblem, was a settled German community that was an island in the anti-German feeling of the Great War. This is seemingly the only place on record in the state where a parochial school taught in German existed. There may have been others. The problems which arose over bilingual families were usually handled with some kind of consideration and understanding by the teacher.[6] The Emblem school was typical.

> This was a German community so I had to compete with a German school conducted by the Lutheran minister, Reverend Germeroth, in the local school building. Often the children had difficulty with certain English words, but as a whole they were a very fine group of children.
>
> I recall an incident brought about by confusing the two languages, I think. At the time I thought it very amusing, so did the children. It was during oral spelling class. I pronounced the word 'sky' to Chris Mayland. He quickly spelled it, 'skee-y' as if it were two letters. Everybody laughed. I hope I was kind and thoughtful enough to explain to him that the English alphabet had no letter, 'skee.' Chris was about 8 years of age then and he seldom heard any language spoken other than German in his home.[7]

Some groups were especially resistant to Americanization through language and had problems with teachers who could not speak the language. At a school near Freezeout a Finnish settlement did not care about learning the American language and the school had many problems with non-Finnish speaking teachers. Most of them limited themselves to swearing to satisfaction in their adopted language, but kept all other conversation in their native tongues.[8]

Most parents realized that in such small communities a foreign language was a handicap. Most of these people came to America to improve their lot in life and they were reluctant to retain any customs that might interfere with their children's success. Parents had every intention of making good American citizens out of their children and seeing that they had a better life than they did. This was especially true in the mining camps, even though mining was a well paid job. The hard work and constant danger did not make it attractive to the foreign parents who wanted their children to have a better way of life.

The Mexican population of the state has been the largest minority group and the one that has probably been here the longest outside of the American Indian. There did exist strong feelings against the Mexicans due to the religion, Catholic, which was suspicious to the Protestant community. Their complexion and racial features made them stand out in the community and their eating habits differed from the white Protestant. Laramie County school board did decide that if anyone other than "the Mexican family" attended school, then the school would be held in the regular school house. If just Mexicans were attending, their reasoning ran, then the Mexicans could attend school in a small building near the Mexican family's home.[9]

The Indian children generally attended government schools on the reservation and mingled with white students there without incident.[10] There seemed to be little conflict between the groups, and the children learned and played together without incident. School records noted whether children were white or of another race and

these figures were given sometimes, and sometimes these forms were not filled out at all.[11] However, enough records exist to make some sort of assessment of the number of Indian students who attended school. Attitudes towards Indians varied with the teacher, and small groups of Indian children attended regular schools around the state. Their culture was taught, albeit a white version, and the romance of the plains made them somewhat attractive members of the school community. Generally their parents did not mix socially with the white members of the community and the students dropped out of contact with their white playmates when they found a place in reservation life.[12]

The "Equality State" reflected the national views regarding blacks, unfortunately. A law passed by the legislature of the Wyoming Territory in 1869 provided for a general taxation for schools rather than voluntary contribution, and also provided that if there were fifteen negro children within a specified district, with the approval of the county superintendent, a separate school could be formed. The first segregated school was in Laramie in 1875. The Cheyenne Daily Leader reported on the opening of that school.

> The colored population are to have a school in Laramie. They have rented a school building, hired a teacher and school will be commenced at once. This is certainly praiseworthy for our colored brethren.[13]

Blacks generally congregated in the railroad towns of Laramie, Cheyenne, and Rawlins, but were found throughout the state. There is an account of a black teacher being hired by a country school. A Ms. Juanita Simmons was hired by the Bar Cross School in Sublette County during the 1950's. Apparently she satisfied the school

board's standards, but no further records are available on her, although students of that school can be located if community reactions to her presence in the community need to be studied. It is not known if any other blacks taught in Wyoming country schools, but Ms. Simmons presence at a white country school would have to be considered unusual.[14]

There were Japanese and Chinese students in the various schools around Wyoming, and some were sent off during the summer months to Japanese schools in Denver where they were taught the Japanese language. The children were glad to return to Wyoming at the end of the summer because they could write with pencils again instead of brushes. The parents of Japanese students were amused at the visiting teacher's clumsiness with chopsticks during home visits, but they placed a high value on education and encouraged their children to go on with schooling.[15]

Clashes of eating habits did occur with other ethnic groups. One county superintendent remembered that when she visited a school she was eating a tuna fish sandwich. She was asked by one of the Navajo children what kind of sandwich she was eating. She told the child it was tuna fish salad and asked if the child would like one. The child refused. Later, during a conference with the teacher, she discovered that the Indian mother had found fish in a can to be a very simple meal, and she had fed so much of it to her children that they brought a whole sack of canned tuna to the teacher and told her, "You keep it. We don't want it!"[16]

Teachers did work with parents on their naturalization tests and helped them to qualify for citizenship. The parents would

attend school in the evening and sit in the desks that their children had occupied during the day.[17] Probably the lessons best learned by the immigrant related to hygiene, and it was a valuable lesson for the native born child who was also a stranger to basic care of the body. Hedwick Miech remembers that it was at school where she learned caring for her body for the first time, and the lessons learned there stayed with her for the rest of her life.[18] Teachers also influenced diet through talks on nutrition and the appearance in later years of the county nurse also had an influence on family life for the immigrant. Nellie Hodgson's observation that the parents learned more from the schools than the children did is probably true, but that aspect of rural school life hasn't been documented.

The ethnic groups had the same problem in Wyoming as any other group that might try to keep its identity: there are far too many people in small towns to remain aloof with a distinct sense of identity. The social clubs and newspapers founded by immigrants in cities like New York and Chicago couldn't find enough readers to stay in business. Constant social contact with neighbors and no reinforcement of custom, traditions, or language by contact with other members of your own ethnic group would tend to erode distinct social characteristics.

There is little information on the later migrations of displaced persons from Europe after World War Two, but it could be assumed the same conditions would apply to their survival and adjustment to American life. There were some prisoner of war camps located in Wyoming, notably near Lovell, and some of those men

returned to these areas after the war and became American citizens. By then, however, the country schools were on their way out, but some may have had children who attended country schools. At present there is no information available on the movement of Cubans or Vietnamese to Wyoming, but the small size of their numbers would guarantee a submergence into the American culture which the country school might intensify but not initiate.

The schools are the national churches of the country, because they are the only institution given the task of unifying a very diverse group of immigrants who brought a variety of religious, political, and economic beliefs with them. The morning pledge to the flag is viewed with horror by many foreign visitors, but it is a ritual in the schools because one of the school's primary tasks is to produce citizens. The pledge may be seen as compulsory, but there are accounts of where it was optional to the students and teacher, but reasons for this option are not given. Perhaps, in the case of Seven Day Adventists, it might have religious overtones that would conflict with the harmony of the community.[19] The heavy patriotism evident in various school documents, social functions, and school activities implies a need for a unity of belief about the country. The ever present portraits of Washington and Lincoln, often bought with money from the teacher's pocket, are two of our greatest symbols of national unity: Washington for founding the country, and Lincoln for preserving its unity.

The reason for such sparse information on the Americanization of ethnic groups in Wyoming might be attributed to the effectiveness of the schools in carrying out that process in other states, so by

time the first generation Americans came to Wyoming, they were already Americans by language and custom. However, this subject needs more research and it will undoubtedly turn up more information on the role of the country school in the Americanization of ethnic groups.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Milt Riske, "Country Schools and the Americanization of Ethnic Groups," Final Report submitted for Country School Legacy, February, 1981, p. 1.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Hyatteville School Records, 1901 to 1944.

[4] Hedwick Miech, taped interview, Sheridan, Wyoming, October 24, 1980.

[5] Robert Barthell, "Country Schools and the Americanization of Ethnic Groups," Final Report submitted for Country School Legacy, February, 1981, p. 2.

[6] Barthell, p. 2.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Riske, p. 4.

[9] Ibid., p. 1.

[10] Barthell, p. 4.

[11] Hyatteville School Records.

[12] Barthell, p. 4.

[13] Riske, p. 2.

[14] Ruth Wilson, letter to Ruby Preuitt, September 7, 1980.

[15] Riske, p. 5.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Barthell, p. 2.

[18] Hedwick Miech.

[19] Agnes Radcliffe, taped interview, Sheridan, Wyoming, October 24, 1980.

TEACHERS: THEIR ROLES, RULES & RESTRICTIONS

The state of the teaching profession from the 1880's to 1950 requires some comment because it influenced the training and professional activities of the country school teacher in Wyoming. States like Wyoming were under pressure to increase their population for statehood and to get some sort of economic base established that would finance the state government once statehood had been obtained. The Homestead Act and the new rail transportation systems accelerated the number of people moving into the state, a movement that continued with varying degrees of intensity until the 1920's. The flow of people into their homestead plots meant a number of people were concentrated around the state, but they were separated by the respectable size of the land holdings permitted under the Homestead Act. Most of these homestead settlers had children which meant that schools had to be started to provide the education the children needed, and in a time when school busing was unheard of, the school had to service

a limited number of families. At this point in history of public education in Wyoming there weren't enough teachers available, and if they were, the small one and two pupil schools could not afford to employ them.

Like other states, especially in the Middle West, who had gone through the homestead growth pains, Wyoming found that it had need of a standardized, mass education program that could be run at relatively low cost. Although there was a concern for quality education, the realities of geography and population growth precluded using centralized schools where well trained professionals could be used to instruct large groups of students. The families that would have provided the children lived too far away from any urban center to take advantage of these schools even if they existed. The alternative was to build a number of small schools with local money and staff them with young teachers who were trained in basic disciplines of study, but who also had some training in methodology. This was a pattern that had been followed in other states and had proven itself effective, and it was an education system which lent itself to application in Wyoming.

The legislature required compulsory education in 1873, stating that school would be free to all children ages seven to twenty-one.[1] This was an ambitious law, and a farsighted one, but without a teacher training program the state could not adequately examine all its schools and could not afford to turn teachers away even if they did not have the necessary certificates or college courses. Early teachers, prior to 1900, needed no normal training. They could get a certificate by passing the state test, and the only

restriction the state tried to hold to was that the applicant be eighteen years of age, but this restriction was also overlooked.

> I was barely seventeen when I started to teach. My schooling had been interrupted when my parents moved to Wyoming in the year 1900. I had not completed the seventh grade at the time but I kept trying to increase my knowledge until, at the age of 16, I secured my first teaching certificate by examination in all subjects that I was expected to teach, as was the custom at that time. No one knew or cared about degrees, college credits, or semester hours. But if a person could read and write well and get a grade of 75% or more in the tests, he was supposed to know how to teach school.[2]

There were probably more regulations concerning conduct than actual schooling, and this too is understandable if one remembers that this was the end of the Victorian Era and these were basically young teenage girls who had never been away from home, who came from rather limited, provincial backgrounds themselves, and knew little about the world around them.

The precedent for young women teachers had been established in other states, and although the profession was not the exclusive property of women in the 19th century, they did tend to dominate the field. Men have traditionally used education as a step to some other profession or business calling, but women tended to stay with education because it was the only field they could develop professionally without fighting the deep seated prejudices of the male dominated business world.[3] The training system for the profession had to be quick, intensive, and cheap. The students had a lot to learn, had to be turned out quickly to meet school demands always present in the early years, and it had to be priced so the girls from land poor families could get training without being priced out of the market.[4]

The "normal" training system had been devised elsewhere, but it played an extremely important role in Wyoming education. It helped to raise standards of both teachers and schools, and it provided at least reasonable competency in the teacher. Students of Virginia Ailor Layton, who taught the Normal Training course at Douglas High School, have, fortunately, written down the type of training they received and an assessment of its value in their teaching career. It was a successful system. In her autobiographical review of the program at Douglas, Virginia Layton gives a breakdown of the studies and the purpose of the normal program. These were basically the same for all other training programs in the state with varying degrees of success when compared to the Douglas program.

The purpose of the course, according to Layton, "was to help supply Wyoming's rural schools with teachers who knew Wyoming's rural problems and school conditions."[5] Students who had completed three full years of work in an accredited high school were admitted. The fourth year students received a teacher's certificate which was valid for one year. Fifth year students were issued a certificate for two years. Both certificates were subject to renewal under regulations controlling the renewal of certificates drawn up by the state department of education.[6]

Classes taught were: Special Methods, Pyschology, Agriculture, Major Reviews, Secondary Subjects, and Rural School Management and Observation. The course in special methods gave emphasis on the development of good teaching habits. The courses in agriculture made the teacher familiar with the farmer and his problems and gave

the teacher some insight into the community she would enter. Review work in spelling, arithmetic, grammar, and social studies sharpened the teacher's knowledge in the basic disciplines of study.[7]

One of the important observations of Virginia Layton was that the course in rural school management was "taught with the aim that the normal trainers would become a real force in their community."[8] A proper relationship between the teacher and the school patrons and board members would ensure success for the school. The success of the school depended on what the teacher did inside and outside the classroom. Extracurricular activities were as important as classroom methods. The normal training course was not seen as a course that would turn out fully developed rural teachers. The students "were led to feel the necessity of further education in higher institutions of learning."[9]

Who were the young people who entered these normal training courses and why did they enter teaching in a state that promised boom town wealth to industrious, hardworking people? Motives are difficult to discern and often people cover up true intentions. But, given the wide range of people interviewed and documents studied for this project some generalizations can be made. Many of them came from homes where the mother had been a teacher and a respect for the mother's hard work and dedication turned many girls into the profession. Women like Lavinia Dobler and Nellie Hodgson recall their mothers hard work with admiration and took their mothers as models for their career.[10] The teacher was the only professional person most rural communities ever saw since they

lacked doctors, lawyers, and other prople with professional training that young people might be influenced by. Bea Baker recalls "always wanting to be a teacher" because the persons she loved and respected the most outside her family were the teachers she encountered in small rural schools.[11] The image of the school-teacher in the popular arts such as the cowboy film and pulp magazine undoubtedly had a strong influence. Novels such as Owen Wister's The Virginian also presented the teacher as a very positive figure in the developing West, and the novel did make Wyoming attractive to many readers. Teachers also came West to file on homestead land themselves since the law made no distinction between men or women and others were lured here with the promise of "Growing up with the West."[12] Large numbers of single homesteaders and ranchers also made teaching as a step to matrimony and the number of successful marriages between schoolmarms and ranchers and farmers is a matter of record.

The board members preference for single women, although not always the case, put a premium on young girls, widows, and divorcees as candidates for vacant teaching posts.[13] The schools were in isolated communities, necessitating boarding out at neighboring ranches, a detriment to the married women even if they were inclined to accept the job. Some schools seem to have always hired single women only, but most of the accounts agree that the rule against married teachers would become enforced during times of economic setback. The Great Depression of the 1930's was an example of this. Teachers who had taught well were suddenly dismissed because they were married, but the real reason was that the communities wished to

spread the jobs around and anyone who was already supported could be let go. Peg Poulson's release letter was typical for the times.

> My Dear Mrs. Poulson:
>
> It is with much regret to us, as a school board, and I am sure it will also be to the patrons of the school, not to rehire you for the coming year; but we have such an over-supply of applications that we find it necessary to dismiss all who have other means of support. Therefore, we are hiring no married women.
>
> Neither will we retain any teacher who marries during her term of school.
>
> Your work has always been very satisfactory.
>
> Clerk of District #11
> Signed: Fred E. Graves[14]

This letter was from an honest board. Others hid behind the argument that teachers might get pregnant, might want to leave in the middle of the year, married women couldn't devote themselves fulltime to their work. But the shortage of teachers during World War Two caused the boards to actively seek out any available candidate. Some teachers recall with bitterness that the young teachers favored during the Depression left the state for well paying jobs in industry and government during the war years, and the older married women called back to teach had been denied a decade to practice their profession.[15]

The adjustment of the out of state teacher to Wyoming culture could be a difficult process, and the fear of young teachers entering the world for the first time could be a frightening experience. The normal training was rather thorough in its preparations, even when the teacher was faced with a troublemaker.

> The scope of Virginia Layton's Normal Training was almost unbelievable. I will never forget the day that the dark eyes of the 'terror of the seventh grade' shared their glee with cohorts as they viewed the high school girl who dared to usurp the teacher's place. It was a disconcerting prospect, but Normal Training students were prepared. We

> were carefully schooled as to the probable behavior of mischievous students. We had written plans which forecast student reaction as well as teacher preparation. For many years that 'terror' was my slave. Why? Accidents do not bring this reaction from a lively student; I have repeatedly blessed Mrs. Layton for the training which gave her students practical training for practical situations.[16]

Others encountered situations that weren't covered in Mrs. Layton's courses nor were they part of their past teaching experiences.

> I was to teach in a dance hall. Everyone was so kind and friendly that I took the position at once. The first day of school 30 pupils in all eight grades came and there was not enough desks for all of them. The unlucky ones had to sit on nail kegs, milk cans and what ever I could borrow from the store keeper. It was several days before enough desks were sent out from town.[17]

The above school was used as a dance hall and Sunday school and the teacher, who also taught a Sunday school session, found that she had four bootleggers in attendance. Every Monday morning she would have to gather up and destroy whisky bottles lying around the hall before the students arrived for their classes.[18]

The encounter with the romantic figure of the cowboy was often a startling affair. When May McAlister took a teaching job near Kemmerer, her first meeting with a cowboy occurred when a group of them skidded their horses to a stop at a picnic table. Others fell in love and received from her cowboy the band from his ten gallon hat to use as a belt. Marriages followed courtships and courtships began in ways that might seem a bit unconventional today.

> On her way to school one morning after, Iona saw two cowboys sneak out of the log school building, mount their horses, and ride away. When she entered the classroom, she noticed on the front chalkboard a sketch of a horse's head and a cowboy, and lettered below was 'The first lesson to learn is to love your teacher.' As she scanned the message, she smiled when she noticed, 'I have a dreadful case of cowboy heart trouble on you.' The message was unsigned, but she found out it was her cowboy dancing partner, Vigo Miller.[19]

One school teacher became involved with the noted gunman Tom Horn who had a habit of attending ranch dances to check out the new schoolmarms. He was remembered as an excellent horseman, good cowboy, and a gentleman. One teacher became fascinated with Horn and when he was brought to trial for murder she was a star witness. In an attempt to save Horn's life, she accused the son of the rancher she boarded with of committing the murder. She was tried for perjury and left Wyoming. Horn was found guilty and hung, and the charges were dropped against the schoolteacher.[20]

Loneliness was a problem for some teachers, but not for others. Many of them had come from the same sort of communities themselves and fit in very well. Others found the loneliness difficult to adjust to. Some had difficulty coping with various forms of frontier "humor."

> Very often the boys ran away from school at recess or lunch time. One afternoon they had climbed nearby trees and refused to come down. I moved a chair outside and spent the afternoon watching 4 boys in the trees. I excused them from 'school' at 4:00 p.m. that day. Apparently, for revenge, one afternoon my son and I left school, a rifle shot drove me back into the building. Each time I ventured outside, another shot, from the 2nd story bedroom window occupied by the 10th grader. Jack and I remained in school until after dark when I could sneak out. The parents thought it was a big joke on 'teach.'[21]

Much of the loneliness was dispelled by the students with whom most teachers found a satisfying relationship. They shared the students lunches, prepared by everyone, and went on long field trips in nearby mountains or creeks. Most retired teachers feel as Janet Froggatt does: "I still have contact with most of my country school pupils and I must say I am proud of all of them. They are all good citizens."[22] Fun had to be made and the teachers,

some of whom were younger than their students, cut blocks of snow to make igloos and chinked the cracks between the logs of the schoolhouse with mud from a nearby creek.[23] The strong community ties were strengthened by programs at the school, but the small number of students made it easy for a teacher to become a friend and companion to her charges.

Many times the teacher had to board out and live under conditions that were far from satisfactory. Early teachers found themselves sleeping in dugouts in the side of a hill, living in a log hut that had only one kerosene lamp that had to be carried from room to room, and lodgings where the "bathroom" was a ditch bank a short distance away from the house.[24] While attempts at socializing were limited, teachers learned to adapt to the conditions or leave. This did, however, develop in the teacher a sense of self-reliance. Weather was always a danger in Wyoming. It brought blizzards in the winter and grass fires during the hot summer months. At that time there were no telephones and the teacher had to make it to school in bad weather just in case any of her scholars arrived and no one was there to take care of them. It is amazing how <u>little</u> time was lost to bad weather. It was the teacher's sole responsibility to take care of the situation in bad weather and the community expected it of her. During the winter months it was literally a matter of life or death. Mildred Morgan walked four miles to school in winter weather and froze her feet so badly the toenails dropped off. She and the students soaked their feet in kerosene, a method used to "draw out the frost" from the foot. The teacher was expected to take care of herself.[25]

Teachers often had to stay over night in the school house to wait out a blizzard. Anna Ballard's experience at the Black Ridge School was repeated many times throughout the state.

> I boarded two miles from school on the Freeman Ranch. When the hired men did the chores, they decided we shouldn't go to school because the blizzard was too fierce. About eight thirty it cleared a little so I decided to go, fearing that the youngsters nearer the school might come. We had perfect attendance as usual--- We completed our day's assignments, had a brief lunch period and skipped our recesses and started home a little early. It was difficult to head "Old Major," my horse, into the storm as I went home. He reared and whirled as I guided him into the cutting snow and wind. When we arrived at the ranch, we found another rancher and friend, Charles Saul, crying. He had come from the Colt Track Road and was sure that none of us survived being out in the worst blizzard he had experienced. Our sleep was restless because of our concern that all the children reached home safely. Happily, they all were in school the next day.[26]

Other teachers didn't survive these experiences. Viola Garrety, returning to her duties at the Stambaugh ranch, left her car in a snow storm and her body was discovered the next morning five miles away from safety.[27] Coal and wood fired trains often ignited the prairie grass along the tracks and fires would result. In one such incident the teacher led her pupils out of the school when sparks landed on the roof. Some of the students wandered off, and when the teacher returned to the building to search for them, she was fatally burned.[28] Dedication to the profession had more than lip service.

What qualities did the teachers themselves see as important for their profession. Generally they always mention dedication to the work, a love of children, and an ability to be innovative and independent.

The older teachers are the most disturbed over what they see in the profession. Younger teachers now look upon their work as a job and are in it for the money. Early teachers wanted pay, but they also felt a sense of mission in teaching that has disappeared. Early accounts of job hunting tell of being warned not to ask about the salary being offered because that would be "unprofessional."[29] They did feel rewarded for their work in the money they received and in the sense of accomplishment. The harsh life many led needed more than a paycheck to overcome and these teachers found a sense of belonging in the communities they served and in the accomplishments of students they helped on through school. One amusing sidelight on Wyoming teaching was reported by Pauline Peyton.

> My second year was as a fourth grade teacher in Douglas. Then came World War II and I joined the Women's Army Corps. When an investigating officer asked me why I thought I was equipped to serve overseas, I told him that I had taught school in Wyoming. He must have thought that was adequate qualification because General Marshall's office sent me to Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten's Allied Southeast Asia Command where I was to become WAC Staff Director with the rank of major.[30]

Primitive conditions in the classroom were almost overwhelming at times, but teachers could, and did, successfully cope with limited materials. One teacher started a pen pal correspondence with a school in another state to give her students practice in writing and to make contact with the outside world for children who knew only family and neighbors.[31] Literature studies were made more interesting by having the students act out scenes from stories and great historical events.[32] Some teachers, in their only chance to touch lightly on a historical personage, found themselves giving children an experience that they would never forget.

> In the fall of 1937 everyone in this part of Wyoming was very excited because President Roosevelt was to visit our state and would come by train to Casper. Everyone that could get away hurried to Casper to see him. The children asked if we could just go down to the depot, which was a short distance from the school house and watch the train rush through. Of course we could. We hurried over to the depot where there was a water tank for use of the trains. The only other persons left in the small town was the store keeper and the depot agent. They and my little group of excited pupils waited for the train. Imagine our surprise when the long train stopped to take on water. A man came up to us and asked if we would like to see the president. No one will ever know the thrill we had when the president raised the shade on his window and sat waving at us.[33]

Whether it was making birch bark canoes to bring home the message in "Hiawatha" or giving students a poetic lesson on the evils of gum chewing, the teacher's basic skills had to be augmented by an inventive mind. Many former pupils remember a poem by Virginia Layton who passed it on to her normal training students, and they in turn passed it on to their classes. Perhaps it is a case of the students remembering the illustration but forgetting the lesson.

A gum-chewing girl
  And a cud-chewing cow,
Are somewhat alike

But different somehow...
  It's the intelligent look
On the face of the cow![34]

What has happened to that sense of dedication and love of students is tied to some pattern in education that emerged with the coming of the consolidated schools. The most impressive thing about the interviews and documents gathered for this report is the sense of accomplishment these early teachers felt. They believed their schools belonged to them and that their dedication and work was repaid by the community in a kind of respect and trust that is lacking in the profession today. They are remembered with love and

respect by both students and community. Nostalgia can dim the harsher aspect of rural school life in Wyoming, but the claims made for it by its former students appear to be sincere. Many former teachers wish they had been better educated, but given the times they lived in and the tools and material available for the task, they performed quite well.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Milt Riske, "Country Schools as Historical Sites," Final Report on Country School Legacy, February, 1981. p. 3.

[2] May Shoemaker, unpublished professional autobiography, cover letter dated May 15, 1963.

[3] Nellie G. Hodgson, taped interview at Pioneer Home, Thermopolis, Wyoming, December 29, 1980.

[4] For many years families owned large amounts of land, but lacked the ready cash needed for tuition at the University of Wyoming. Travel distance to the University, which is located in the extreme southern border of the state, also meant funds for travel. The normal training program was the only schooling that could be met financially.

[5] Virginia Ailor Layton, unpublished professional autobiography, undated.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Both of these women, mentioned elsewhere in this report, had strong influences from their mothers, and when the opportunity came to leave teaching, they did and became active in the business world. They are an example of women who broke loose from the idea that teaching was the only suitable profession for a young lady.

[11] Bea Baker, taped interview, Pioneer Home, Thermopolis, Wyoming, December 29, 1980.

[12] Hodgson.

[13] Shoemaker.

[14] Peg Carver Poulson, undated professional autobiography.

[15] Myra Connell, taped interview, Lander, Wyoming, February 15, 1981.

[16] Pauline Peyton, unpublished professional autobiography, undated.

[17] Gladys Hanlin Swope, unpublished professional autobiography, undated.

FOOTNOTES
(Cont.)

18 Ibid.

19 Milt Riske, "Teachers: Their Roles, Rules, and Restrictions." Final report on Country School Legacy, February, 1981, p. 3.

20 Ibid., p. 4.

21 Robert J. Barthell, "Teachers: Their Roles, Rules and Restrictions," Final report on Country School Legacy, February, 1981, p. 9.

22 Janet Froggatt, unpublished professional autobiography, undated.

23 Ibid.

24 Riske, "Teachers: Their Roles, Rules and Restrictions," p. 11.

25 Mildred O. Morgan, taped interview, Sheridan, Wyoming October 24, 1980.

26 Anna Schick Ballard, unpublished professional autobiography, undated.

27 Riske, "Teachers: Their Roles, Rules, and Restrictions," p. 10.

28 Ibid., pp. 14-15.

29 Velma Silver Edwards, unpublished professional autobiography, undated, p. 2.

30 Pauline Peyton, p. 2.

31 Margaret Hoglund Coe, unpublished history of Upper Sage Creek School, undated.

32 Pete King, taped interview, Thermopolis, Wyoming, January 31, 1981.

33 Swope.

34 Layton.

READING, WRITING, 'RITHMETIC, AND RECITATION

The curriculum of the country school is essentially a study in standardization. This trend toward standardization in Wyoming schools followed a national demand for adults trained and competent in basic academic disciplines, and a national tendency to standardize a product when it is produced in mass quantities. It was also an attempt to give a mobile population basic skills that could be transferred to other areas of the country. Several means were used to achieve a standardized curriculum: accurate record keeping, standardized teacher training, and a standardized course of study. Teacher training has been discussed elsewhere in this report. In its early years of the state's settlement almost anything went in education.

> Wyoming had no courses of study so each teacher used the material brought with her from her native state. There were few home grown teachers in the state and no native born teachers. Few of the district officers kept records or made reports or took the trouble to insist that the teachers prove their certification[1]

Little attention has been given to the role of the record book publishers in the shaping of Wyoming education. They responded to the needs of state legislatures for information on school taxation, and in the process conformed the legislatures to the record keeping procedures they published. An examination of early school record books tell a great deal about the chaos of education in Wyoming at the turn of the century. A record book used in 1901 that carried a copyright date of 1894 stated the author had produced "various records, and a system of records and reports for County Teacher's Associations."[2] This indicates that for the Western states no standardized system of record keeping existed since the books were not produced for a given state. Later editions of the book have a promotional blurb stating the book is "equally adapted to graded and non-graded schools and conforming to the laws of the several states."[3] The indication here is that other states began requesting books that reflected a legislative plan for school support. A 1911 edition of the "Welch System" of recording data states that it is a Wyoming Edition, evidence that special state demands were now being placed upon the publisher.[4]

The chaos resulting from badly educated students being channeled into standardized curricula makes many of the notations reflect this transition period. Notes to the teacher in the front of the book ask that both oral and textbook work be graded, a hint that textbooks were lacking in some schools. The heavy role that a "system" is going to play in education comes with the warning that new teachers should not make changes.

> New teachers should not make radical changes in the organization of the school until they have become familiar with the school and then not without good reason.[5]

The increased emphasis on professionalism is indicated with a warning that "It seems superfluous to say that no true teacher will, by word or action, disparage the work of his predecessor."[6]

A mixture of methods for assessing the student's work are present. The comment on students contain such notations as "Needs glasses," or that the teacher is not following the course of study so she is giving a general assessment of each student rather than the books studied or months of school they have attended. This would indicate that texts and required days of school attendance have not yet been fixed. One rather amusing Calvinistic comment by a teacher to her successor cautions that "One should never give perfect marks in deportment."[7] A commentary, perhaps, on the imperfectability of man.

The record books list courses offered, and one special course is noted, "The Humane Treatment of Animals." This sort of education would be natural in a farming community, but could also conceivably be the result of groups such as the SPCA which brought pressure to bear on the state legislature. Legislatures needed information on schools and the books provide some interesting facts for them. Entries ask for the number of feet of blackboard, months of school taught, condition of the school, volumes in the library, and the number of visits by board members and county superintendent.[8]

The introduction of standardized textbooks and tests in the 1920's is noticable and teachers make notations showing the texts they have been using and the ones that students used at other schools. There are warnings to the new teachers to be aware of students who have not had standard texts and for the first time a scale is introduced to rate students against a state or national

average on their tests.[9]

The standardization of the textbook and course of study meant teachers had to be trained in the course of study and follow it closely.

> ...I started teaching by making my daily schedule, checked the course of study to be sure we were covering the material outlined for the year and that we were covering the material in the prescribed time. Any of Mrs. Layton's 'girls' would have been guilt ridden to have not completed the work outline in the course of study for each grade for each subject.[10]

Generally speaking, the teachers used the course of study and found it to be of great help. It would give assistance to a teacher who might be weak in some area of study and give her enough preview of the year's material to make adequate plans and preparation for teaching the subjects. The teachers institutes were used to reinforce the course of study and to help teachers with practical tips on teaching. Reports on teachers institutes in the Wheatland newspaper gives some idea of how the course of study was reinforced.

> Topics and speakers at this meeting are to be as follows: Primary class demonstration, Miss Maggie Martin; special methods in history and beginning geography, Mrs. Nannie K. Clark; construction tasks for seat work, Eleanor Hayes; spelling methods in writing and spelling, Muriel Hemmant; language, Cleta Somerville.[11]

The realities of the training and institutes, however, often had to collide with the realities of the situation. One teacher claimed there was no course of study or teacher's manual in the district because the board claimed, "That's what they hired teachers for."[12] Some of the math books had answers in the back, one teacher tore out the answer pages. The students retaliated by destroying the answers in the teacher's book. The teacher and the students ended up working out the problems together.[13]

Courses such as music and art suffered because many teachers lacked training in such subjects, but this was offset by the purchase of phonographs and the use of radio. One school had a radio and "Every Friday morning at nine we had the Walter Damrosch Musical Appreciation Hour. Special workbooks were provided and I think it established my fondness for classical music."[14] Other students listened to recordings of choral numbers and practiced in the school. Later they would compete in county and state choral competitions.[15] Art courses could range in quality from the perfunctory drawing of witches and cats at Halloween to winning competitions at the state fair.

Courses in hygiene grew out of concern with communicable diseases and the general crowding of students in classrooms. There are many stories of the difficulties in teaching this course because one often collided with family life styles. The state legislature as early as 1885 required schools to teach the effects of alcohol in their hygiene classes.[16] Although the subject of hygiene matter was easy to instruct, it was difficult to practice for the schoolhouse itself was without water to wash with and the building might be surrounded with dead animals or cow chips. Teachers tried to remedy bad hygiene by notes to parents, but often received a snappy reply that "you old maid school teachers don't know what a man smells like."[17] The teacher would then be reduced to bathing the children herself.

> 'The boys' union suits were ankle length, full sleeve and trap door seat. They were part wool, but on the Johnson brothers a darker color. 'Not only was the underwear dark with dirt, the buttons had been removed and where they had been were sewed up for the winter.' Undaunted, the teacher cut the threads and bathed each boy.[18]

The students enjoyed the competitions which the teacher injected into the dull curriculum. Spell downs and cipher downs were usually reserved for late in the day and especially for Friday afternoon. The early schools stressed writing and the essay exam was standard fare, but the introduction of the standard test with its multiple choice answers and true false columns displaced it. Many teachers felt that writing suffered as a result, although the students could cover much more material with the new standard tests.[19] The teachers did feel that they could accomplish more than their contemporaries because they concentrated on the subject matter. Janet Warriner feels that in today's schools the constant interruptions for "films, P.E., Band, Music, special classes" are a deterrent to learning and a frustration to the teacher who wants to teach.[20]

Discipline was not as much a problem as the popular history of country schools might make out. There were problems from time to time, but there existed a sense of discipline in the teacher's presence and the parents were quick to note any bad behavior. "Spanked at school--Spanked at home" was the traditional saying, and it was applied. Students were made to wear a dunce cap and stand with their nose to a circle on the blackboard, but most students and teachers recall very little corporal punishment which they saw in the larger schools they later attended. Much of this was due to the fact that the children knew one another and the atmosphere of the classroom was one of cooperation and not intense competition. Evelyn Cichonski recalls a man teacher from Indiana who was a good teacher, but he had fist fights with the boys which

upset the rest of the class. She noted that teachers were a part of the community and were respected by parents and children which helped to reduce discipline problems.[21]

Memorization was a learning tool and many of the old country school students still remember poems. Prizes were given for a fixed number of poems memorized and for a given number of books that had to be read. The students were tested on their reading and memorization and the county superintendent would give awards to the students during the graduation ceremonies. Class room discipline was tightly maintained and many bewildered young students on their first day of school couldn't understand the need to be quiet. The despair of these scholars was expressed by one little boy after attending his first day of school at Cokeville. He told his mother, "There isn't any use of me going back to school." His mother asked why, and he replied, "I can't read, and Mrs. Middaugh won't let me talk!"[22]

The most astonishing thing to modern teachers, the products of environmental psychology, is the fact that the actual physical building had little to do with learning. Adults who attended these schools felt they received an excellent education in the basics and had not suffered because of the country school background. They received considerable individual attention and consideration from the teacher and were required to do high quality work.[23] Learning itself was valued highly, and rewarded, and students later felt that what they learned had application in their lives. Reading was stressed heavily and the teacher often took time during the day to read a favorite book or to have students read

aloud, both older and younger students receiving the benefit of the readings.

Cooperation was fostered by the need for older students to help the younger students and the teacher generally acted as a catalyst in the learning process. Students could see a relationship between what they were doing in the lower grades to the material being taught in the upper grades. In a sense it restored the craftsman's touch to learning. When one is aware of what they are doing, and what it leads to, there is a stronger feeling of accomplishment. It cannot be ignored that the fact students were related or had been neighbors all their lives was a positive force in the community learning. The neighborhood school in the urban areas seemed to have possessed a similar feeling at one time but this was lost when those were closed and students sent to larger "central" city schools. Perhaps there is a snowball effect in education: once something gets too large it falls apart by its own weight.

The simple requirements of that learning needed little orientation for the teacher. Paste was made from flour and water, students mixed their own ink, writing was done on slates or "Big Chief" tablets, and students could help the teacher in the actual preparation of class material.[24] The recess recreation games were simple and their rules of play were passed on from one generation of students to another. Wyoming variations might include killing rattlesnakes, drowning gophers, or sliding down a gumbo mud incline in rainy weather.[25] Teachers often took children to a frozen river for ice skating and prepared hot cocoa for them when they returned.

The games were recreational and few of the children felt any intense competition involved in them. Rules were changed in baseball that would handicap older students and permit younger students to get on base. The differences in ages and physical builds were adjusted by the students themselves. Some schools did have visiting P.E. instructors, and there was an occasional complaint about a "health nut" teacher who took students jogging during their recess, but generally the students made do themselves and did well at it.

"The teacher made the school" is a common reaction to the question: "Did you get a good education?" Learning seems to have taken place in the kind of environment most educators can only theorize about today: one of trust and confidence. The students were eager to learn, and the teachers felt they had something to give the student. One wonders, as do most of the people interviewed, if the price of good training for a specialized job hasn't been traded off for some rather good training as a human being. The one comment that runs through all the interviews, written material, letters, and feature stories on country schools is that the students felt they were in a sort of "family" that was very close to them. They remember their classmates years later with affection. The teacher was also included in that "family" and a remark by Mary Riley is typical of the feelings most students had about their teachers twenty to sixty years later.

> The teacher that term was Miss Mamie Beerline who boarded with a nearby ranch family. She was a kind and understanding young woman and well liked by the children.[26]

The students felt that whatever they lacked in equipment, supplies, and books was more than made up for by a dedicated teacher. This

is something the education profession ought to examine more closely today, because the major complaint listed about the modern school is that "The teachers just seem interested in the paycheck!"

When the age and background of the average country school teacher is taken into consideration, it is remarkable that they left such an impression on their students. Often very limited themselves in the subjects they taught, they worked hard with the students and approached the more difficult problems with the idea of "Let's you and I work this one out together." The central curriculum was sound, according to former students and teachers, and could be grasped by the average student.

Most of the students would be considered "poor" by today's standards, but it didn't seem to effect the love of learning. "We were all poor, but since everyone was the same, we didn't know any different." The student could seldom afford to buy many items and supplies in some of the poorer districts, and the teacher's ingenuity was taxed time and time again to make up for the shortcomings. The years of the Great Depression were especially bad for many people. Mrs. Close recalls a classmate whose parents had lost their ranch and the father went down to the river and built a log house out of cottonwood logs with his own hands. The family lived in the house and got food by hunting. The children still attended school, however, and the other children didn't think any the less of them because of the way they lived.[27] At that simpler time, money and life style had little to do with brains and learning.

Shortcomings though these schools may have had, they tended to pass on a love of learning which was more important sometimes than

the subject matter itself. Gwen Woodward still remembers the teacher in her normal training who gave her a love of history.[28] The teachers inspired many to go on with their studies, and they did. I think this section of the report can be closed with a comment on a student who utilized his early country school training and went on for more education.

> There are many people who received good, basic educations in the country schools which didn't have the advantages of modern-day equipment and teaching aids. A cousin was one such person. After completing eighth grade at Goldie Divide School and graduating from Hulett High School, he attended the University of Wyoming on an academic scholarship and received his B.S. and M.A. degrees. He earned a Ph.D. in botany and joined the faculty of Washington State University in 1939, where Cwnbey Herbarium was named in his honor in November, 1974.[29]

The school was also as good as the <u>student</u>, something we tend to ignore today.

FOOTNOTES

1 "Early Wyoming Schools: Hot Springs County," Wyoming School Board Bulletin, vol. XV (May-June 1971): 6.

2 Hyatteville School Records, 1901-1944.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Beaver Creek School Board Minutes, record books, 1908-1915.

9 Hyatteville School Records.

10 Anna Schick Ballard, unpublished professional autobiography, undated.

11 Wheatland Times, November 11, 1921.

12 Milt Riske, "Reading, Writing, 'Rithmetic, And Recitation," Final report for Country School Legacy, February 1981, p. 2.

13 Ibid., p. 3.

14 Ibid., p. 4.

15 Georgia Close, taped interview, Clark, Wyoming, December 7, 1980.

16 Riske, p. 6.

17 Ibid., p. 7.

18 Ibid.

19 Vera Saban, unpublished professional autobiography, February 7, 1981, p. 5.

20 Janet Warriner, taped interview, Buffalo, Wyoming, October 10, 1981.

21 Evelyn Cichonski, taped interview, Sheridan, Wyoming, October 25, 1980.

FOOTNOTES
(Cont.)

[22] Lenore Manning Middaugh, unpublished professional autobiography, no date.

[23] Ruby Preuit, "Reading, Writing, 'Rithmetic and Recitation," final report for Country School Legacy, February 1981, pp. 1-2.

[24] Riske, p. 4.

[25] Ibid., p. 9.

[26] Mary A. Riley, History of the Goldie Divide School: 1927-1928, unpublished autobiography, October 4, 1980.

[27] Georgia Close.

[28] Gwen Woodward, taped interview, Cody, Wyoming, January 9, 1981.

[29] Riley.

COUNTRY SCHOOL TODAY

Where is the country school at today? That is difficult to say because people are divided over its effectiveness, even if it could be reinstated in its old glory. Since the abolition of the office of county superintendent, the country schools are largely supervised by the various town school administrators. Their success today, as it was in years gone by, depends on an interested interaction between school officials, teachers, and students. Ample funding is not the problem in the restoration of country schools.[1] The people who attended them and taught in them are sharply divided in their own minds on the viability of the country school in our society.

The country school does teach well, but it is not enough. Subject matter in basics is not the only tools a child needs for success. Persons interviewed for this report felt that the many activities which are offered by the large, consolidated schools

teach students social skills that are essential in today's corporate society. The increased specialization in teaching also produces students better trained in subject matter, but it is at the expense of the community spirit which the country school excelled at. No one knows how this can be changed.

There are things on the immediate horizon which might force the country to look at the small, rural school as a way out of some contemporary difficulties.

The country school still exists in isolated areas of Wyoming where topography and population density make consolidation impossible, or at least impractical. But the very invention which brought about consolidation, the school bus, has a crisis of its own in rising fuel costs which are the major portion of any school district's budget. If this can be resolved by new technology, consolidation will probably be intensified and wipe out all but a few of the remaining country schools. This will also influence the number of students who can participate in extracurricular activities at consolidated schools: trips for basketball and football games. These trips are part of the "extras" that parents like to see their children participate in. A simple reduction of these activities alone might make the country school attractive again.

The renewed emphasis in education on peer tutoring and smaller class size may force education to look at its present methods of instruction and decide that it can be done better in a country school.[2] More importantly, there is a general dissatisfaction expressed about how the public schools are performing. The current concern over "back to the basics" has been fanned by the press to crisis proportions, but the people interviewed for the project

still want the "extras" and do not want a simple basic curriculum. They know their children will have to compete with other children who have had the extras, and they are afraid their children will be edged out.[3]

Students are, of course, the major concern in education. Although students attending country schools today like the learning environment, they miss the activities at larger schools and the chance for socializing. But these are the sort of things that teachers who have taught in both systems claim destroy the very environment the students like. The rural school cannot compete with the specialized offerings that give students in depth studies and training in any one subject area. Experiments in using visiting teachers at rural schools to teach courses like art and music might be a solution to the problem. Mary Porter teaches at three country schools using the Jackson schools as an administrative base. She can provide specialized art training to isolated schools.[4] But the limitations on time and money might make this a problem for some districts who have few large high schools.

Students who have moved to Wyoming from other urbanized states to follow the energy boom with their parents seem to enjoy school for the first time in their lives and want to finish all eight grades in a country school. But eventually there is the practical problem of finding work or an education after graduation. Then they will have to compete against students who have had more intensive training. This may not have been a problem at one time, but a society which is based on science and technology needs early training in those disciplines. Those disciplines require facilities

that are not available to most school districts because of their cost. Schools which have only one or two students would be at an even greater disadvantage.

Some of the retired teachers interviewed for this report have grandchildren and great-grandchildren in consolidated schools, and they would not like these children to go back to the country schools because they have a wider choice of training at the larger schools. They all comment on the higher lever of work students do, but they are also critical of the poor grounding they get in basic language skills and in math. They especially appreciate the chance for training in music and feel this is best done in a larger school. Many of them remember their own sketchy exposure to music and feel that it is important.[5] Other retired teachers feel a sense of inadequacy now when they reflect on their own teacher training. They felt they taught all they knew, but they realized later that they didn't know everything. The limited horizons of those teenage teachers are now sources of uneasiness: Did I hold someone back because I lacked the knowledge to pass on to them?[6]

The boys who attended country schools enjoyed the simple games, but would have liked to play in competitive sports. This kind of competitiveness is fostered by our society, but it must come at the expense of communal sharing in the form of games which permitted children of all ages to play. The activities of the consolidated school are hard to duplicate in the small rural school.

The actual physical building of the rural country school can be, and has been, made more healthy and attractive, but what goes on in that building depends on the teacher since she is the one who sets the tone for the learning process. This is a major problem:

the recruiting of teachers willing to isolate themselves in small communities. Some of the young teachers today find the isolation attractive and enjoy the close relationships they have in the school and in the community. The salaries demanded by the specialized teacher with advanced degrees is out of the reach of many districts, however, and there is some question whether or not specialized training in the lower grades is really necessary. Can the old way still hold? Can we still say, as many did in interviews, "Country schools are necessary in our ranching country to maintain the family unit which is essential to our American way of life." That schooling is where we "learned the communication skills we needed to get and hold a job, to marry and raise families, and become good citizens."[7] Parents feel that their children are not learning these things in many town schools today.

The physical plant can be modernized, and though that was a concern of early country school teachers, it did not have an influence on learning, if we are to believe the people who atended them. The Valley View school is a model of the modern rural school. This facility has all the advantages of its urban sisters including a gym and utility room, electricity, plumbing and heating.[8] But, as we have learned to our dismay, simply putting up a building does not make a good school, no more than building a new gym produces a winning basketball team.

The loss of community has been associated with the movement to consolidated schools. Some school patrons feel that their communities have fallen apart and lost the identity which was fostered by country school programs and socializing.[9] There are others who

argue as strongly that these memories of community are simply nostalgia and that the new consolidated schools offer a much better education than they ever had.

The State Department of Education believes that several techniques must be considered to continue and strengthen the rural education program. These include an idea bank for teachers; identifying model schools for imitation; increasing communication and cooperating between the State Department of Education and local schools; increasing community involvement in rural schools; developing strong pre-service and in-service programs; conducting research on the stress of rural teaching and how to stem the high rate of teacher turnover; assessing the role of rural schools in community development. This dedication is a sad comment on the times. The experts must now be called in to create a community school. The rural school's fate is now in the hands of experts and not in the hands of the community.[10]

The fight against consolidation that took place in many communities was lost, and this too is a sign that the schools have passed out of community, even board, control. The rise of professionalism in the teaching profession has made the teacher the arbiter of things educational and the board and community feel that they have no role left in the education of their children. Boards which at one time had to deal with provincial teenage girls who applied for a teaching position now find themselves talking to aggressive young professionals who demand top dollar and conditions for employment. If the vacancy is to be filled, the board must give in. The father and mother who had a satisfactory education

in country schools cannot understand the teacher who speaks a technical language filled with references to studies and tests which are meaningless to them. Teaching is now a science and requires a degree of expertise that is puzzling to the parent who finds his son working the same grammar problem he had as a boy, but the son is doing very poorly at it, even under the tutelage of an "expert."

There is also the side of professionalism that hurts many of the older, retired teachers. Teaching is now done for the "paycheck" to a degree that was unthinkable in their time. There is a general acknowledgement that the kind of dedication to teaching that once existed is now gone.[11] Teachers, like doctors and lawyers with whom they identify, demand money for their services and don't want their clients to tell them how to perform.

Do country schools still offer a good, basic education? If education is defined as knowledge of a subject, they probably do not. They do offer a good environment for learning, which also promotes interest in advanced education. Perhaps the one thing they can offer our society at this time is a chance for young people to experience learning in small groups under the direction of a person who knows each member of that group well and who has a good relationship with them. Country schools were a "community" in the best sense of that word. Is that community enough today? Most parents think so, but there is the world outside and they want their children to have the best chance at succeeding in it. The country school, like the agrarian society envisioned by Thomas Jefferson, has collided with the scientific technical world, and it lost, or at least has been seriously set back.

Whether this will be a permanent loss no one can tell. Judging from the people interviewed and the documents examined, the country school has much to offer in the way of turning out human beings who can share with one another and enjoy a sense of community. Maybe that is their role today: creating an alternate life style that can produce good human beings. The scientists, technicians, and businessmen will come out of that society, but they can take their specialized training for the outside world at a point in their lives when they have learned what life with their fellow man should be.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Ruby Preuit, "The Country School Today," final report for Country School Legacy, February 1981.

[2] Ann Hinckley, taped interview, Powell, Wyoming, January 10, 1981.

[3] Betty Bent, taped interview, Thermopolis, Wyoming, January 31, 1981.

[4] Mary Porter, interview, Jackson, Wyoming, October 14, 1981.

[5] Mara Nations, taped interview, Thermopolis, Wyoming, January 31, 1981.

[6] Bea Baker, taped interview, Thermopolis, Wyoming, December 29, 1981.

[7] Preuit, p. 1.

[8] Milt Riske, "The Country School Today," final report for Country School Legacy, February, 1981.

[9] Ibid., p. 2.

[10] Ibid., p. 5.

[11] Nations.

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